



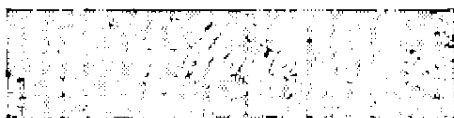
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NEWS

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Vent holes key to healthier light cigarettes

By **AMY OAKES**
Collegian Staff Writer

As society continues to jump on the health bandwagon, even smokers are trying to find a better alternative.

Mitch Wood (freshman-division of undergraduate studies) said he stopped smoking regular cigarettes and switched to a light brand because the tar and nicotine intake became "too intense."

Smoking light cigarettes may seem like a healthy alternative, but for consumers who do not know about vent holes, light cigarettes can yield the same amount of nicotine and tar as full-strength brands.

Manufacturers put vent holes around the filters of light cigarettes to allow air to enter the filter, diluting what the smoker inhales. In most cases, the vent holes are a half-inch from the cigarette tip.

Because they do not know about these vent holes, smokers sometimes block the holes with their lips, causing an increase in nicotine and tar yield, said Lynn Kozlowski, head of the bio-behavioral health program at Penn State.

Kozlowski and two doctoral researchers, Janine Pillitteri and Christine Sweeney, recently conducted a study on vent blocking in light cigarettes. The study is part of Kozlowski's ongoing research on cigarette

smoking.

Last fall, researchers went around campus and collected discarded cigarette butts from 70 outdoor ashtrays. In total, they collected 158 butts from 23 different locations, Sweeney said.

By looking at the tar-stain pattern on the filter, Kozlowski and researchers could determine whether the vent hole had been blocked. Tar from light cigarettes generally forms a bull's-eye pattern, but Kozlowski found that if the tar stain covered the filter, there was vent blocking. Overall, 53 percent of the cigarette butts showed some kind of blocking.

Cigarette manufacturers fail to warn smokers about the vent holes, Kozlowski said. "All they tell you is that it's a light cigarette."

He said it is important that cigarette manufacturers inform smokers of the presence and function of vent holes.

"If you treat smokers as consumers, it seems a fundamental principle that consumers have a right to know about the design feature responsible for the reduced yield of tar," Kozlowski said.

R.J. Reynolds, a cigarette manufacturer, refused to comment.

Although Kozlowski, who has done 20 years of research on cigarette smoking, sees a necessity for vent-filter warning labels, some students do not see the urgency.

Kimberly Davis (junior-journalism) said she did not think cigarette manufacturers are obligated to tell consumers about the vent holes.

"Cigarettes are cigarettes," she said.

Regardless of whether cigarette manufacturers take action, Sweeney said she will continue to do follow-up research on the data they found. One of the possible studies is to look at the types of changes that vent blocking causes in carbon dioxide, she said.

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